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Bill: HB0140
Title: Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education
Date: January 25, 2021
Committee: Ways and Means Committee
Position: Support

To the Honorable Delegate Anne R. Kaiser and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

FreeState Justice is a statewide legal advocacy organization that seeks to improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (“LGBTQ”) Marylanders. We work across Maryland to provide free civil legal aid to LGBTQ Marylanders with low incomes who are facing discrimination. Those clients include students in Maryland schools facing individual bullying and systemic discrimination.

Studies conducted both statewide and nationally have shown that LGBTQ students experience various challenges when it comes to the classroom. The majority of LGBTQ students reported feeling unsafe in their schools (64% of LGB student and 44% of transgender students, respectively).¹ The majority of Maryland LGBTQ students regularly hear anti-LGBTQ comments in their school, and 65% report experiencing harassment or assault based on their identity. Equally distressing, most students (54%) never reported the incident to school staff, and only 29% of students who reported incidents said it results in staff intervention.²

These experiences have serious impacts on student learning and school climate as well as on the safety, health, and wellbeing of Maryland students. The Trevor Project, a national LGBTQ crisis intervention and suicide prevention service for youth, received nearly 1,500 call from Maryland LGBTQ youth in crisis each year, many of whom are considering self-harm or suicide.

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¹ Youth Equality Alliance, Living in the Margins, A Report on the Challenges of LGBTQ Youth in Maryland Education, Foster Care, and Juvenile Justice Systems (2014).

² Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Zongrone, A. D., Clark, C. M., & Truong, N. L. (2018). The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation’s schools. New York: GLSEN.

Research has demonstrated that the inclusion of LGBTQ identities into school curriculum can significantly reduce suicide, depression, and bullying³. For students facing discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, the erasure of people like them from their education further compounds negative messages from unsupportive sources. By presenting affirming, authentic, and accurate representations of LGBTQ culture, youth can visualize and honor the positive contributions of LGBTQ individuals throughout history.

Additionally, research shows that educators, including primary and secondary teachers, want to include LGBTQ identities in their curriculum but lack the resource awareness or guidance in order to do so⁴. Maryland has the opportunity to comprehensively support both LGBTQ students and educators through the creation of Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education. This bill would give schools tools to represent LGBTQ identities throughout their curriculum.

LGBTQ students deserve to have safe and affirming school spaces, and that includes the curriculum they engage with. This legislation contribute to improving the health and well-being of LGBTQ and reduce the frequent experiences of bullying and harassment they encounter in school environment. FreeState Justice whole heartedly supports HB0155, which will create a commission to intentionally include the contribution of the LGBTQ community to civics and history.

FreeState Justice strongly urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB0155.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation, and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Jeremy LaMaster
Executive Director

3 Proulx, Chelsea N., et al. "Associations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning-inclusive sex education with mental health outcomes and school-based victimization in US high school students." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 64.5 (2019): 608-614.

4 Page, Michelle L. "From awareness to action: Teacher attitude and implementation of LGBT-inclusive curriculum in the English language arts classroom." *SAGE Open* 7.4 (2017): 2158244017739949